

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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TAGS: PINT, BF

SUBJ: PINDLING PROROGUES HOUSE AFTER BACKBENCH REBELLION

1. AN ANGRY GCOB PRIME MINISTER PINDLING PROROGUED THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY AUGUST 14 AFTER A COALITION OF PLP BACKBENCHERS AND OPPOSITION MEMBERS EFFECTIVELY KILLED A PUBLIC FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE BILL (SEPAIR) ON WHICH HE HAD STAKED HIS PRESTIGE. PINDLING PROMISED TO REINTRODUCE THE BILL WHEN THE HOUSE REASSEMBLES AUGUST 23. THE PROROGATION WILL HAVE LITTLE EFFECT ON THE GOVERNMENT'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM BUT HAS FUELED SPECULATION AND WHAT IS PROBABLY WISHFUL THINKING ON THE PART OF FNM SUPPORTERS THAT PINDLING IS "LOSING HIS GRIP."

2. THE SENDING OF THE BILL BACK TO COMMITTEE AUGUST 12 WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY A NEAT PIECE OF LEGISLATIVE SLEIGHT-OF-HAND ENGINEERED BY PLP BACKBENCHER CARLTON FRANCIS AND ACQUIESCED IN BY SPEAKER ARLINGTON BUTLER, WHO IS ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO THE BILL. FRANCIS, STATED THAT HE INTENDED TO SPEAK FOR THREE HOURS AFTER THE AUGUST 12 LUNCH BREAK, SO MOST GOVERNMENT M.P.'S -- INCLUDING PINDLING AND THE PLP WHIP -- DID NOT BOTHER TO SHOW FOR THE POST-LUNCH RESUMPTION OF DEBATE WHICH BEGAN IN THE PRESENCE OF A BARE QUORUM CONSISTING OF FIVE PLP BACKBENCHERS, FOUR FNM, TWO INDEPENDENTS AND ONE PLP REGULAR. QUICKLY COUNTING HEADS, FRANCIS MOVED TO SEND THE BILL TO COMMITTEE, PLP APOSTATE MOXEY

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SECONDED AND THE MOTION WAS CARRIED 10-2. BUTLER JUST AS

QUICKLY APPOINTED A COMMITTEE OF KNOWN OPPONENTS TO THE BILL AND MOVED ON TO THE NEXT AGENDA ITEM.

3. THE BACKBENCHERS' MOVE WAS NOT ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED, GIVEN THE GENERAL OPPOSITION IN THE HOUSE TO DISCLOSURE OR AT LEAST THIS BILL'S VERSION OF HOW DISCLOSURE SHOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED AND GIVEN THE FACT THAT, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF FRANCIS, THE PLP MEMBERS TAKING PART ARE NOT EXPECTED TO BE RENOMINATED AND, THUS, HAD LITTLE TO LOSE. (THE WHIP WAS ON, AND PINDLING HAD REPORTEDLY THREATENED TO HAUL NON-COMPLYING PLP MEMBERS BEFORE THE PARTY'S GENERAL COUNCIL FOR DISCIPLINING.) WHAT IS PUZZLING IS PINDLING'S CONTINUED INSISTENCE ON STAKING SO MUCH POLITICAL COINAGE ON UNAMENDED PASSAGE OF SUCH AN UNPOPULAR PIECE OF LEGISLATION. HIS RAM-ROD TACTICS HAVE EXACERBATED AND PUBLICLY SPOTLIGHTED ALREADY SEVERE INTRA-PARTY SQUABBLING, BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO THE BACKBENCH CAUCUS THAT HAD REMAINED CONSPICUOUSLY SILENT SINCE MOXEY'S DEPARTURE FROM THAT GROUP IN APRIL. ALSO, EVEN IF THE BILL FINALLY PASSES, THE DEBATE SURROUNDING IT WILL DRAW PUBLIC ATTENTION TO THE CORRUPTION ISSUE, THE BILL'S LOOPHOLES AND THE RELUCTANCE OF MANY M.P.'S TO SUBMIT TO DISCLOSURE.

4. PINDLING IS OBVIOUSLY IN AN UGLY MOOD, FIRING ONE OF THE REBELS, LIONEL DAVIS, FROM HIS JUNIOR MINISTER POST IN THE MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT AND TAKING NOTE, IN HIS AUGUST 14 PROROGATION ANNOUNCEMENT, OF BUTLER'S ROLE IN THE AFFAIR. IT IS ALSO THE SECOND TIME IN A WEEK THAT PINDLING'S "COOL" VENEER HAS BEEN CRACKED, THE FIRST BEING ON THE AUGUST 9 "CONTACT" PROGRAM. SUBJECTED TO HARD-HITTING QUESTIONING BY TWO HOSTILE REPORTERS, HE BANGED HIS FIST AND RESORTED TO IRRELEVANT INVECTIVE ABOUT OPPOSITION LEADER CECIL WALLACE-WHITFIELD'S WIFE.

5. UNLESS HE COOLS DOWN AND LISTENS TO THE COUNSELS OF COMPROMISE, THE PLP'S ELECTION CHANCES COULD BE DIMINISHED BY CONTINUED EMBARRASSMENT ON THE FLOOR OF THE HOUSE AND BY WORSENED INTERNAL PARTY SQUABBLING. AS A MATTER OF FACT, IT IS EVEN POSSIBLE THAT, RATHER THAN RISK ANY MORE SUCH DAMAGE, PINDLING MIGHT OPT FOR AN EARLIER ELECTION -- LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REPORTEDLY ONE OF THE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AT A LENGTHY CABINET SESSION AUGUST 13. THE NATURE OF THE DEBATE BEGINNING AUGUST 23 SHOULD PROVIDE AN INKLING OF WHETHER EVENTS WILL MOVE IN THAT DIRECTION OR WHETHER THE PAST WEEK'S MINI-REVOLT CAN BE CONTAINED AS THE TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT IT SHOULD BE, GIVEN THE ARITHMETIC OF THE HOUSE AND THE "OUT" NATURE OF THE BACKBENCHERS INVOLVED. TAYLOR

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